



**Connecticut Education
Association**

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Testimony of John Yrchik

Executive Director, Connecticut Education Association

Before the

Joint Committee on Education

*Regarding Governor's Bill No. 830, An Act Concerning the
Governor's Recommendations Regarding Education*

March 9, 2009

Good afternoon Sen. Gaffey, Rep. Fleischmann, and members of the committee. I'm Dr. John Yrchik, the Executive Director of the Connecticut Education Association, representing over 37,000 Connecticut teachers.

I'm here to speak to you about Governor's Bill No. 830. Because our time together is short, I would like to get right to the point. The governor proposes to hold Education Cost Sharing grants to cities and towns for the next two years at this year's level.

This is a cut in current services. Level funding is a misnomer. It in no way permits local schools to maintain existing programs and services without local tax increases to supplement state aid. Standards and expectations have never been higher for our students and teachers. Meeting those standards and helping all students develop 21st century skills requires resources, reasonable class sizes, and high quality teachers. These cost money. We believe that additional ECS funding in the neighborhood of \$65 million would be reasonable. By contrast, so-called "level" funding will force program and/staff reductions across the state. We already have evidence of this.

The other point I'd like to make is that the governor's bill lacks transparency. To get to level funding, Gov. Rell intends to use \$545 million in federal stimulus money to supplant state funds that are dedicated to state education aid. She intends to reduce basic education aid to cities and towns by 14% over the next two years. It's hard to

celebrate this when we think about what will happen when the stimulus money is no longer there.

Our concerns are even more immediate than this. We have been given indications that the governor intends to use far more of this money in the first than the second year. Where will the additional funding come from in the second year? At this point, I can tell the committee members that there isn't even policy guidance from the federal government that permits this to occur. What will happen to the governor's budget first-year plan if she is forced to use the money in equal amounts?

There are no answers to these questions at this point. The depletion of Connecticut's press corps sadly has ensured that many of them will not even be asked. But, they should concern every single citizen of this state.

We have yet other concerns. The decimation of funding for the teacher standards program (that was expected to fund the Mentor Assistance Program) will effectively eliminate a mentor program that promised to deliver higher student achievement, higher teacher retention, and lower turnover in especially challenging districts. We urge you to consider the restoration of funding.

CommPACT Schools, a promising partnership of education organizations, the Neag School of Education, and urban school systems, permits select urban schools to operate with a high degree of independence. Unlike our state charter schools, the CommPACT School effort is geared toward turning around existing schools using existing staff. This total funding for this program, which serves 8 schools, is \$500,000. Again, we believe that the discontinuance of funding cuts off one of the most promising education reforms we have seen in our state in years and jeopardizes outside foundation funding as well.

As the committee considers these and other education cuts made by the governor, I would encourage you to consider the true cost of dismantling and reducing education programs. Students do not get do-overs if they miss critical years and opportunities. Our society doesn't get to go back and fix it later. These cuts will not play out over two years, but over the lifetimes of students affected by them.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to any questions you might have.